

Doubtful results and discussion

This article claims that “among the plant parts eaten by Gaur, teak bark was the most frequent i.e. 14% (see p. 240). It, however, is evident from the data in Table 1 that teak bark was a supplementary for some and the main forage item by Gaur in Pench comprised of other plant parts (86%), specifically leaves (52.7%).

The authors suggest that teak bark was advantageous to Gaur over other plant parts as it has high mineral content (see Table 4, p. 242). However, no values for browsed parts of other plant species have been presented to support the argument. Further, they fail to enlighten the reader if mineral and protein contents in the barks of other available tree species were analysed, and whether they were found to

contain lesser protein and other minerals than their corresponding values existed in teak bark. Further investigations can confirm if there are other reasons for the Gaur to consume teak bark.

The statement “it was easy for the gaur to strip the bark in large quantity and to reach the phloem and cambium layers that are rich in nutrients” (see p. 242) seems to be illogical. It gives an impression that Gaur also removes cortex, endodermis and phloem layers completely in order to reach the hard cambium layers, which are found between phloem and xylem tissues. For a layman who has some knowledge of dicotyledon’s stem anatomy, bark is mainly composed of dead phloem cells and remnants (if any) of the peridermis.

6. A SIGHT RECORD OF MEW GULL *LARUS CANUS* IN GOA¹

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The mouth of River Chapora at Morjim, Pernem, north Goa (15° 37' N; 73° 44' E) is a regular haunt for large numbers of gulls. Brown-headed Gulls *Larus brunnicephalus* usually form the bulk of the birds present, with variable numbers of up to six other species often being encountered.

As the leader of Sunbird Tours, I have visited Morjim about 30 times. During one such visit, on December 14, 1996, I found a first-winter Mew Gull *Larus canus* among the several thousand gulls that were roosting on the beach. The bird was watched for about 20 minutes, at ranges down to about 40 m by Paul Hyde, six other observers and me. We used a variety of optical equipment between us. I used a pair of 7 x 42 binoculars, and a telescope with magnification of up to almost 60x. Since many of the other observers and I lived in Britain, the Mew Gull was a species which we were very familiar with, and the bird presented no identification problems. Nevertheless, I recognized its local rarity, took some notes and made a hurried field sketch. I had previously seen one other Mew Gull in India, a second-winter bird with other gulls on the Ganges, at Garhmuktesar, Uttar Pradesh (28° 48' N; 78° 06' E) on March 05, 1993. This latter sighting has not been published other than as a brief report (Robson 1993).

Description

When perched, the bird appeared perhaps 5-10% larger than most of the neighbouring Brown-headed Gulls and noticeably bigger than all of the Black-headed Gulls *Larus*

ridibundus present, yet was significantly smaller and more daintily proportioned than all the accompanying large gulls (both Heuglin’s Gull *Larus heuglini* and Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*). Beside a more neatly rounded head and slimmer legs, the Mew Gull also had a proportionately shorter, neater bill, with a much reduced gonys, when compared with these larger birds.

The mantle, back, and most of the scapulars were a uniform blue-grey colour and were obviously darker and bluer in hue than the upperparts on all the small gulls present. Several of the bird’s lower scapulars were still juvenile and retained the scaly, brownish, pale fringed appearance typical of that age.

The white forehead and loreal area shaded into denser streaking over the crown and ear-coverts extends down onto the paler nape. There was a dark, almost blackish spot on the lores immediately in front of the eye, while the streaking on the lower hind neck swept around the front to form a weakly defined breast band of larger chevron-shaped scaling. The remainder of the bird’s underparts were whitish, although the longer, lateral undertail coverts were also marked with conspicuous, rear pointing, brownish chevrons. Rump, uppertail coverts and most of the tail were also white, and there was a neat, and rather narrow, dark brown terminal tail band (the latter covered approximately one quarter of the tail’s total length).

The folded wings were essentially brown, but on closer inspection, all of the smaller coverts were intricately

patterned, each with a darker brown shaft and pale fringe. There was a noticeably paler greater covert panel, the tertials were contrastingly dark brown and neatly fringed with white, this fringe being broadest around the tips of these feathers. The folded primaries were even darker brown than the tertials and appeared similar in shade to the tail band.

The legs were dull pink, as was the bill base. The distal third of the bill was neatly tipped black, and the eyes were dark.

The bird appeared indistinguishable from the nominate western *Larus canus canus*, which we see abundantly in Britain, but on range is most likely to have been the very similar *Larus canus heinei*. These two subspecies are not safely distinguishable in the field.

Status

This is perhaps only the fourth of the five sightings in India, and is currently probably the southernmost anywhere in Asia. Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) map four records for India, while Grimmett *et al.* (1998) map the three earliest sightings, and there is an additional, more recent record. In date order these are:-

A first-winter visitor on the River Yamuna at Okhla, Delhi (28° 34' N; 77° 17' E) on January 19, 1992 (Alström 1994).

A second-winter on the Ganges at Garhmuktesar, Uttar Pradesh (28° 48' N; 78° 06' E) on March 05, 1993 (Robson 1993).

A first-winter visitor seen by Per Underland at the Harike Lake Wildlife Sanctuary, Punjab (31° 10' N; 74° 57' E) on January 9-15, 1994 (Robson 1994).

The River Chapora at Morjim, Pernem, Goa (15° 37' N; 73° 44' E) on December 14, 1996.

An adult at Pong Wetland, Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh (32° 05' N; 76° 00' E) on February 06, 2004 (Jan Willem den Besten in litt. December 2004 Unpublished data).

Elsewhere in the region, the species is considered to be a vagrant to Nepal, where Inskipp and Inskipp (1985) list three records, all in January-February between 1979 and 1983. The Mew Gull is rare in Pakistan, where Roberts (1991) noted five records, involving six birds, including a probably exceptionally sighting as late in the season as April 04, 1984.

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7. WINTERING RANGE EXTENSION OF WHITE-THROATED BUSHCHAT *SAXICOLA INSIGNIS* GRAY IN INDIA¹

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The wintering range of the globally Vulnerable White-throated Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* Gray in India was known to be from Haryana to Jalpaiguri, north West Bengal (Ali and Ripley 1987) before two records in Assam extended its wintering range further east to Manas National Park (26° 40'-50' N; 90° 50'-91° 25' E) (Narayan and Rosalind 1997), and later to Kaziranga National Park (26° 30'- 45' N; 93° 5'-40' E) (Sarma *et al.* 1997). Recent observation of this bird in eastern Assam has further extended its wintering eastern range to Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (27° 35'-50' N; 95° 10-

40' E) and Merbil (27° 19' N; 95° 18' E) near Naharkatia. The White-throated Bushchat has also been observed in other areas of Assam other than these two places.

In the afternoon of January 25, 2004, a male was observed in Merbil near Naharkatia, foraging on an *Alpinia allughas* grove and calling "tsek ... tsek ... tsek". The bird was observed at about 4 m height from the water level.

A female bird was observed on the northern edge of Deepar Beel Bird Sanctuary (26° 05' N; 91° 40' E) on February 02, 2003 by the first author. It was foraging among short